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# THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

### READY

As we go to press, the question of war with Germany is unsettled. Our newspapers and magazines are filled with articles showing the general unpreparedness of our country for war. If we are to believe such public statements, we are lacking in ships, officers and men for the Navy, in officers and men for the Army, and in equipment for both, such as guns, ammunition, clothing, tents, means of transportation, etc. Congress is considering measures not only for the rapid development of our fighting forces but also for compulsory military service which will give to every able-bodied young man a certain amount of military training before he has reached the period of economic value or domestic responsibility. In only one department do we see the announcement made that the government has enough, and that is of trained nurses. The Army Nurse Corps and the Navy Nurse Corps are at full strength, and their reserves, as represented by the Nursing Service of the Red Cross, of nearly 8000 of our most highly trained women, would be sufficient for any demand made upon it. Nurses did not need a second experience like the Spanish American War in order to see the need of preparedness for an emergency of this kind. The immediate result of that experience was a concerted action on the part of our two national societies for a place in our Army for women nurses in time of peace, and naturally a similar service for the Navy followed.

For the benefit of young graduates who do not recall the details, we mention in passing that for both of these departments, bills had to be presented to Congress and the same method of procedure followed to secure their passage as is necessary for the passage of, or the amendment to, a state law, the details of which are familiar to most of them.

The movement for an adequate nursing service for the Red Cross, the responsibility for which should rest upon the shoulders of nurses themselves, goes back to 1908, when the Superintendents' Society and the American Nurses' Association appointed a joint committee to confer with the Red Cross authorities at Washington. To those who are interested in this important event in our history, we would suggest that they read the report of the Federation of Nurses, given in the Superintendents' Society report of 1909, and the report of the convention of the Associated Alumnae of that year, found in Volume IX of this JOURNAL, when the relations with the Red Cross, as they now stand, were being worked out. It was not all easy or pleasant or without some undercurrent of friction, but because we knew that we were right and because the whole nursing body, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, pulled together, we stand today the only group ready for its place in national defence.

Although this situation is so gratifying, we should not rest upon it, but should influence the young women as they come from our training schools to enroll immediately for service in the Red Cross. As we have said many times in these pages, this field service in time of war would rest largely with the younger women who are familiar with the latest hospital technique and who have not exhausted their reserve physical force by long years of professional work. To the older group would be entrusted supervision of the home organization, but like the soldiers, the younger women would be the first to be called.

In this immediate situation that is before us, while the question of defence is being considered by the people of the whole country, our older women have a conspicuous part in the work which is being done at home. They should first of all become members of the American Red Cross, the method of procedure being to enroll in the chapter nearest at hand, and should take an active part in the work of that chapter, not as nurses, but as citizens.

The Red Cross work of instructing the women of the leisure classes who would wish to give voluntary service to the government in time of war, is placed in the hands of nurses. Where there is a Nursing Service Committee, this responsibility makes a direct connection between the teaching work and the Nursing Service Department in Washington. With such affiliation, it rests with the nursing group to keep constantly before the women taking these classes its purpose, which is that in time of calamity they may give intelligent assistance to the nursing staff or fill positions of responsibility in military hospitals that would release the trained women for active nursing duties. Whether the proper attitude toward such service is maintained by

the voluntary workers rests largely with nurses themselves, working through these home groups.

In case of war, which we are all hoping will be averted, there should be no place in this country for friction between professional and lay workers and no opportunity for conditions which have existed in foreign lands. If the plans of the Red Cross are supported by the government, our soldiers would be assured the same good care as is provided for the ordinary citizen in time of peace.

The reason for the success of the nursing service of the Red Cross has been that the women of the whole country have been united in developing it. There has been no division in the ranks as to the need or the wisdom of the plan. When we shall have learned to bring this same united effort to bear on our standards of education and our laws for state registration, the results will compare favorably with that which has been accomplished in making ready for defence. The pitiful situation which has arisen in England endangers all that a splendid group of women has been working for years to accomplish. This is due to the fact that the nurses of that country have not stood solidly together.

#### THE NEW IMMIGRATION LAW

So quietly has a great piece of work been accomplished that few nurses in the country realize that they had any special interest in the immigration law recently passed by both houses of Congress over the veto of President Wilson. All had felt the humiliation however that arose from the fact that under the former law nurses had no professional status but were classed by the government as contract laborers, excluded from the country when engagements to fill professional positions were arranged outside the borders of our own land. In the bill which has just passed, nurses are classed with professional people, the clause reading: "Provided further that the provisions of this law applicable to contract labor shall not be held to exclude professional actors, artists, lecturers, singers, nurses, ministers of any religious denomination, professors for colleges or seminaries, persons belonging to any recognized learned profession, or persons employed as domestic servants."

The profession is indebted to Dr. Helen Parker Criswell, graduate of the Children's Hospital, San Francisco, and a resident of that city, for the accomplishment of this task. She was appointed by the directors of the American Nurses' Association to carry through this difficult and delicate piece of legislation and, working through a number

of western officials, and as a result of two visits to Washington, made at the time of her journeys east to attend the January directors' meetings of 1916 and 1917, the nursing body now is given government recognition with the professional group. This decision will in time, undoubtedly, have a marked effect on the social status of the nursing body.

#### A LAST MESSAGE FROM EDITH CAVELL

We are glad to reprint from the *Alumnae News* of the Alumnae Association of the New York Hospital, at the request of Clara Weeks Shaw, the following letter, written the night before her execution by Edith Cavell and addressed to her Belgian nurses. It was translated from the French and sent to the *Alumnae News* by a Dutch nurse, Miss van der Hoek, who had been one of her pupils.

MY DEAR NURSES: I am writing to you in this sad hour to bid you farewell. You will remember that the 17th of September brought to an end my eight years as directress of the Training School. I have been extremely happy to be called to aid in the direction of the work which our committee has founded. On October 1, 1907, there were only four young pupils. You are now already quite numerous, I believe fifty including those who graduated. I have told you on different occasions about the difficulties attending our start, even in such details as the choice of words to communicate the hours of service, off duty, etc. All these conditions were new to the profession in Belgium. Little by little one service after another was established; graduate nurses to do private nursing, pupil nurses were assigned to the Hospital of St. Gilles, also the Institute of Dr. Depage, the Institute of Beysinghen, the Clinic of Dr. Mayer, and at present, many are being called, as you all will likely be later, to take care of the brave soldiers wounded in the war. During the past year our work has diminished, owing to the sad experience we are having, but in happier days to come our duties will increase with new vigor, and with beneficial results.

If I speak concerning the past it is because it is sometimes wise to look behind on the road we have traveled, and to take account of our errors as well as our progress. In your beautiful Institute you will have a greater number of patients and also all you will need both for their comfort and your own. To my great regret, I have not always had an opportunity to confer with you in person. You know what a burden I carry.

I hope you will never forget our evening talks. I told you that your devotion would bring true happiness, and that the thought that you have done your duty before God and your own conscience will be your greatest support in the trying periods of life, and in the face of death.

Two or three of you will remember our little intimate talks. Do not forget them. Having arrived at mature age, I have perhaps been able to see more clearly than you, and point out the straight path.

One word more. Beware of uncharitable speech. Can I say—loving your country as I do—that it is your greatest weakness? I have seen many unfortunate occurrences in these years that might have been avoided or lessened if cer-

tain little insinuations had not been expressed, oftentimes doubtless without any evil intention, but resulting in ruined reputation, happiness, perhaps even the life of some one. My nurses should remember this fact, and try to cultivate loyalty and esprit de corps.

Should any of you have a grievance against me, I pray for your pardon. I may sometimes have been too severe, but never voluntarily unjust, and I have loved you all, much more than you realize.

My good wishes for the happiness of all my young girls, those who have graduated as well as those who are still in the Institution, and thank you for all the kindness you have always shown me.

Your devoted Directress,

E. CAVELL.

October 11, 1915.

#### PROGRESS OF STATE REGISTRATION

North Carolina has been the first state to report successful legislation in the passage of amendments which amount to practically a new bill, the text of which appears on another page. The nurses of the state made a great effort to prevent the passage of Section 7, but we understand it was supported by two church hospitals and one private one which claimed that they could not do their charitable work without sending their nurses out on private duty while in training. As we understand it, Section 6 makes the bill compulsory. The term of the waiver, which expires on June 1st, does not require the re-registration of nurses who obtained registration under the former law.

It will be seen by the news items from Nebraska, that the nurses of that state have been having difficulty in preventing an attempt to amend their registration law in such a way that women with six months' training or with two and a half years of practical experience, without training, might be admitted to the examinations. The experience of the Nebraska women shows the importance of constant vigilance in safeguarding the laws of the states.

#### A FITTING MEMORIAL

One of the JOURNAL's ardent supporters has recently passed away, Fanny E. Gerard of Indianapolis, who had been partially incapacitated by tuberculosis for several years. In spite of the handicap of illness she had made a brave struggle to keep up her work and her nursing interests. At her death, a nurse friend was asked to use what would be due from her insurance policy, after paying expenses, in a way that would have pleased her. The result is that the training school of the Indianapolis City Hospital will have in its library a full set of the History of Nursing, a gift from Miss Gerard, while in the Relief Fund

report for this month appears a modest item showing her interest in other nurses in need. These simple gifts, great in meaning, should prove an inspiration to many other nurses to contribute from their abundance or from their small store as the case may be, to help their fellows over some hill of difficulty. The Nurses' Relief Fund is doing a much needed work and should have the support of every nurse in the country.

#### MODERN IDEAS OF DISINFECTION.

At the June, 1916 meeting of the New York State Sanitary Officers' Association, held at Saratoga Springs, Dr. George W. Goler, Health Officer of Rochester, N. Y., gave a very interesting paper entitled, *The Proper and Efficient Disinfection of a House*. The gist of which is that the only people who are interested in maintaining disinfection by gases are the manufacturers and the advertisers, that there is no evidence on good scientific grounds that disinfectants ever accomplish anything, and that the only real disinfection is that produced through the cleanliness of soap and water, fresh air and sunlight. Dr. Goler has under his supervision, as health officer, a municipal hospital for contagious diseases where smallpox and poliomyelitis as well as the more ordinary diseases of childhood are segregated. In speaking of the methods practised there, he says:

In the Municipal Hospital during the past five years we have had more than 1600 cases of infectious diseases. Frequently we have had scarlet fever, whooping cough or measles and diphtheria in the same ward, cared for by the same nurses. No disinfectant of any kind has been used in the hospital, not even on the hands of nurses or physicians. We keep the hospital and its belongings clean; the nurses have learned simply to wash their hands in soap and water and wipe them on paper towels. In these five years, too, there has been less than 2 per cent of cross infection.

From these facts and these results, we know that disinfection is useless and expensive. We have learned much of the uselessness of disinfection from one of the foremost sanitarians in this country, Chapin of Providence. Through his teaching and the teaching of others, we have learned not to waste our money in buying useless disinfectants and our effort in applying them. We have learned, too, that there is no such thing as the "proper and efficient disinfection of a house."

It would seem to us that the claims for disinfection in the past were due to the fact that whether done by gases or chemicals, it leaves an unpleasant odor in the room, to remove which it is necessary to throw open doors and windows and allow the fresh air and sunlight to enter freely. Every ordinarily intelligent housekeeper cleans a room thoroughly with soap and water after it has been occupied by a sick person. It is by this cleaning and airing and sunlight, done to remove the fumes of the chemical, that the real disinfection is accomplished.